It’s everyone’s responsibility

Bystander Interventions Toolkit

Please contact Su Nandy s.nandy@imperial.ac.uk if you have any queries or feedback on Active Bystander Training
Manage your mindset

You know you’re right. You know you need to step up and you know you need to step in. But you just need to silence any remaining nagging voices of doubt in your head first.

What goes on inside your head comes out in your communication. So, fixate — in your mind — on something else that you’re absolutely convinced by.

For example, think about the hard and fast fact that the sun will rise tomorrow — or that your first name is X and you are X years old.

This triggers a neurological chain reaction in your brain and will inform your verbal and non-verbal communication to make you feel and appear more confident and convincing.

Good interventions are about getting your point across authentically in order to get your desired result. It does not mean being bossy, judgmental, deliberately confrontational or unnecessarily authoritarian.

www.imperial.ac.uk/human-resources
In the UK and Ireland, when you want to be assertive, it’s more emphatic to finish your point with a downward intonation.

Don’t be tempted by the current tendency to make it sound like a question. It can imply, subconsciously, that you may not be convinced by what you are saying.

The four Ds are: direct action, distraction, delegation and delay.

Several techniques have been roughly allocated to each of the four Ds — but can be interchangeable as you see fit.

**Direct action** involves responding immediately, through speech and body language.

**Distraction** looks at ways of diffusing the situation, or bringing it to a close.

**Delegation** covers referring the incident to others with social power or authority.

**Delay** covers what to do if you don’t want to act immediately, perhaps because you need thinking time or more information.

Overleaf, you will find examples of these techniques. Choose the ones which make you feel most comfortable and practise them in your mind.
Body language
Frowning and raising (not pointing!) one index finger shows disapproval. If you’re sitting down, stand up.

Use the offender’s name
Say their first name (or however you would normally address them) before you make your point/call out the event.

Ask questions to gain assertiveness
“Can I just check — do you consider that behaviour to be appropriate? I’m afraid I don’t — so can we talk about that please?”

If you’re going to call for help, tell the offending party that’s what you’re doing (whilst checking of course that it’s safe for you to do this). Eg “I’m going to speak to X now because I find what’s just happened here offensive and unacceptable.”

Advanced technique
Say what you’re going to say before you say it. For example, “There are two/three things which strike me here. Firstly, —. Secondly, ....” This sets up a sequence and gets you permission to speak without interruption until you’ve made all your points. It commands attention and puts you in a position of authority in other people’s minds.

Distraction
Take the ‘sting’ out by drawing attention to any work tasks you have in hand. For example, “OK, I just want to focus our minds on this project for a second, as the deadline is getting fairly close. Can we just check where everyone’s got to please...?” If the phone rings or if somebody enters the room, it can be useful to use these as reasons to change the subject/distract people.

Take the target away from the situation by suggesting a coffee (or similar). This neutralises the situation, albeit temporarily, and sends a subtle, rather than confrontational message to the offending party.

Advanced technique
Use the word ‘Let’s’. It sounds like a suggestion, but is perceived as a command. Use it when you want something to happen. For example, “Let’s just have a look at — before we do anything else.” It’s softer than giving an order and gets people on side.

An alternative here is the reassuring “Why don’t we....” — especially when someone is confused, in a bit of a panic, or needing someone to take the lead in a situation.
Delegation

Telling somebody about an unpleasant event — especially if they have social power or authority — can sometimes feel uncomfortable and underhand.

It’s useful to ‘inoculate’ against your message if you find yourself in this position. For example, “I’m not sure if I’m doing the right thing here by telling you this, but I figured it was better to raise it than not. And if I’m doing the wrong thing, please tell me. So — here goes...”

This will reassure you that the person you are talking to has plenty of opportunity to stop you if they want to — and, crucially, pushes the onus on them to say if they think your intervention is misguided, with your permission. It also shows you are being conscientious rather than underhand. And most of the time, people will want to reassure you that you’ve done the right thing.

You can also begin your conversation by saying “I need to tell you something important. Do you mind?” and then wait for permission to continue.

Advanced technique

If you feel strongly about what you’ve witnessed, and want to make sure that the person you’re reporting it to acts quickly and decisively, you need to make what you’re about to say sound like a ‘no-brainer.’

Do it like this: “You and I both know that... [main point].”

Or, “You know I don’t need to tell you that... [main point].”

This presupposes that your main point is not up for discussion.

Delay

Having decided to do something about an offending situation but a day, week or even a month later it is important that you reassure the target that you have good intentions, and the reasons for delay. The most important thing they need from you at this point is your support, and the knowledge that you are on their side. Crucially, ask them immediately how they are and if they’re ok. If they are not, then sign post them to the support College offers.

If your delayed action is to speak to the perpetrator, explain to them why there has been a delay — for example, you needed time to think. Let them know what you intend to do, if anything more, and why. Keep calm and unemotional.

If your delayed action is to let someone more senior know, again explain why there has been a delay and then give any relevant details of the incident so that they in turn can take action.